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Soviet Military Able to Smash Through Iran

The Soviets have the military power to smash through Iran to the Persian Gulf and menace the flow of Arab oil to the West. This is a nightmare that has Pentagon strategists tossing in their sleep.

A top-secret assessment warns that the Soviets could "initiate and sustain a full-scale invasion" of Iran in 30 days. But "four to seven selected Soviet divisions could commence a limited attack into Iran's northwestern and northeastern border areas after a preparation period of about 10 days."

Our surveillance satellites and monitoring equipment have picked up "no indication that an invasion is imminent." But certainly the Kremlin must be salivating over Iran, which Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini has left so temptingly vulnerable.

"The U.S. could expect to detect preparations necessary for a full-scale invasion of Iran within one or two weeks after commencement," according to the top-secret report. "However, preparations for a limited Soviet attack to seize Azerbaijan and possibly border areas east of the Caspian Sea might not be discernible before less than a week."

The Kremlin now has 26 divisions near enough to Iran that they could be quickly mobilized into an invasion force, my associate Dale Van Atta has learned. These combat divisions are now deployed against Afghanistan, Iran and eastern Turkey.

A Soviet strike into Iran not only would endanger the western world's oil supply but would also upset the military balance in the Middle East. This could create a debacle so inextricable, a prospect so gloom-laden as to spoil the I-told-you-so's that have been emanating from this column for the past two years.

To stop a Soviet thrust to the Persian Gulf would take nuclear weapons and risk a holocaust. Indeed, contingency plans call for a nuclear response to a Soviet attempt to occupy Iran. Hopefully, the more cautious elements on both sides will be able to control the military hot-heads so that we may somehow muddle through without Armageddon.

Footnote: The two superpowers came close to a military confrontation over Iran in August 1980. But that's a separate story, which I will report in a future column.